

Lifelong Learning and Empowerment in Mental Health

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Re-integrating Healthcare Professionals with User Experience into Mental Healthcare Delivery.

Danish example.

Introduction

Usually having a job plays a central role in our life. It gives us an income, status, an identity and enables us to describe ourselves in relation to other people.

According to the WHO, mental health is one of the biggest challenges facing the EU next to cardiovascular diseases.

Mental health problems account for about 40% of all absences from work due to illness.

From a socio-economic point of view this is costly and adds to the pressure on the public sector and the social security system

Background

Inspired by experiences in the United States and England and especially encouraged by dr Rachel Perkins from London we started what we thought was a brave experimental project in Aarhus, Denmark employing service users in Psychiatric Services as staff members.

The MB project

The project is called the MB-project from the Danish words for service user employees and tries to enable service users to get back into psychiatric services as staff members with the help of:

- the MB training
- their earlier formal training
- their service user background

The idea of the project

Some of the general points about employing people with mental health problems were that employment:

- gives meaning and purpose in life
- affords status and identity in society
- links people to the communities in which they live and enables them to be valued for the contribution that they make
- provides friends and social contacts
- provides the resources people need to do the other things they value in life

But why employ people with mental health problems in mental health services?

- the sector provides much needed employment opportunities
- the employment sets an example for other employees
- improves the quality of the mental health service provided
- enables clients to benefit from the "expertise of experience"
- provides a role model for clients and others
- helps to break down the destructive "them" and "us" divide within services

Inclusion

Statistics for 2007 show that more than 80% of the MBs in Aarhus were diagnosed with depression while in the whole country the figure was about 65% .

About 80 % of the MBs have a relevant educational background as nurses, social education workers, care workers, occupational therapists and psychologists.

A project consisting of two equal parts - or perhaps three parts:

- training
- practise
- support

Training

All user employees must attend a special training program.

Today the training consists of 300 hours spread over one year and 20 weeks of practise.

Experience from the work place is incorporated in the training.

The subjects include for instance:

- the newest knowledge about mental illnesses
- confidentiality
- self-supporting work
- medication
- professional limits in work with users
- role conflicts
- negative/positive experience with revealing of own background

Practise

We have been happy to establish about 200 jobs all over the country through negotiations with institutions in our social psychiatric system, but of course there have been some obstacles in getting service users accepted as staff members.

Most of the service users work between 15 and 20 hours/week.

Support

- support in the recruitment process
- support in the transition to work
- support through a training program
- ongoing support in employment
- ongoing support at work

Financing

The money came in the first stage from the Ministry of Social Affairs and the municipality of Aarhus.

In the second stage from the Ministry of Labour.

New ways of financing

Today the municipalities are responsible for the employment situation in the country.

Our service users can take parts of the official program and go to examinations at the University Colleges.

If they do not want that, they can just participate in the program without getting diplomas.

Now the municipalities, who are responsible for the employment system will pay those training periods.

The impact of this program is much bigger though.

The program is in reality affecting perhaps 10 times as many as the students themselves. What this means in order of getting rid of stigmatization is perhaps the most important perspective for the future.

The situation today

Today more than 200 service users have been able to get employment after the training and of them about 100 in Aarhus.

In 2007 75% of the MB students had got jobs in psychiatric services and 25% outside the psychiatry.

In 2009 the Danish Psychosocial Rehabilitation Information Centre by Jens Hjort Andersen evaluated the MB participants situation.

Of those who answered the questionnaire 75% still had a job 2-3 years after they had finished their training.

Especially the training has given them a feeling of being able to contribute with something to the benefit of the users

A program such as the MB project:

- has a background**
- has a history**
- but should also have a future**

Thank you for your attention.